

# Eugene gladstone o'neill as one of the most dominant voices of american drama and...

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Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (1888-1953) is one of the most dominant voices of American drama and theatre. He wrote not only broadly, forty-seven plays, but also experimented with dramatic techniques, such as plot, character, dialogue and expressionism. This study confers his ten major plays, with singular thrust on exploring the 'play' of the unconscious and the conscious in them. He has criticized the whole structure of contemporary American society. He shows man's desire for psychic wholeness. With this he expects man to gyrate the negative experiences of isolation and difference into positive through involvement in order to relieve him of misery and sufferings. The main characters of his plays try to choose a right course of action amidst acute dilemma. This pushes them to isolation in terms of self, God, and from society. Keeping this in mind, a study has been taken under the title "A Psychological Study of Eugene O'Neill's Plays" to discuss his ten major plays with a thrust on exploring the unconscious and conscious prudence.

O'Neill's play are related to painful aspects of human conditions, and the perspective of research illustrates more on the form of isolation, sense of belonging, loss of belonging, past and present, illusions and relation, alienation and belonging, unconscious and conscious mind. O'Neill has written more than forty-seven plays. This thesis focusses his ten major plays only. Mainly the Psychological aspect of his plays. From O'Neill's first play, "Beyond The Horizon" (1920) all kinds of psychoanalysis take the postulate of the unconscious as obvious. O'Neill underlines in "Beyond The Horizon" about the unconscious/conscious drives that are at work in the conduct of the two brothers, Andrew Mayo and Robert Mayo, who seek to possess Ruth, but whereas Schopenhauer would wake them to give up the desire. Harman

might counsel both the brothers, to grow conscious of the futility of such a desire. However, what O'Neill underlines that, first of all the value both the brothers assign to Ruth is not built-in or inherent in the object of desire, but is purely subjective, and secondly in trying to possess her, alternately, they get bogged in the slimy, i. e. something sticky. Sartre would say, something soft, but repugnant like leech sucking of Shakespeare play " Claudius" response to his world, his possession, his queen in the prayer scene in Hamlet.

The elder brother, Andrew, loves Ruth but when he finds her inclined to marry Robert, he sets out on a voyage. He cannot bear to see her married to his brother. He thus leaves his family and his farm to escape seeing them getting married. On the other hand, Robert, a born dreamer, leaves his dream of going on a sea voyage, of going Beyond the Horizon, in order to get married to Ruth. He agrees to settle down on the farms but as unindustrialized is unfamiliar to his nature, he fails in his vocation, and thus ruins the farm. She felt captivated of him for his poetic talent and romantic nature, but now her hopes for him also undergo a change, and she wants him to become a successful farmer. His disappointment makes her shift her love to Andrew. She wants to be full and complete, but Robert's failure on the farm creates a void in her, a hole, so to say, in her heart. Now, she begins to crave for Andrew. To bridge that break, she decides to leave Robert and reclaim Andrew. But as Andrew has already gone on a sea voyage, she waits for his return. But on his return from his voyage, Andrew's interest in Ruth diminishes and he does not accept her when she professes

herself to him. So, the void in Ruth keeps tormenting her. Andrew's behaviour brings it out clearly that the value he perceived in Ruth was passing and it originated from his subjectivity only which earlier appeared as if she personified intrinsic worth. Since he regards money as something most wanted and precious, his interest in Ruth evaporates.

Similarly, Ruth's move in love from Robert to Andrew displays that it was her subjective craving which lent value first to Robert, and then to Andrew. But Robert's love for Ruth is of the worst kind since it reprobates into the slimy. Both Ruth and Andrew try to come out of their love for Robert and Ruth respectively. Both of them are able to do so, but Robert fails to put his love for Ruth behind, and he is not able to come out of the world of his dreams. Though not happy with Ruth, he tries to make a new commencement as a farmer only to offer happiness to Ruth. But he continues looking at the horizon. What O'Neill advocates here is that there is no inherent value either in Ruth or in the horizon; it is Robert's subjective approach which makes them valuable to Robert only, not to the whole mankind. Thus, both become creepy for Robert, and he cannot live down with his desires. By the end of the play, he continues hiding his dream of going beyond the horizon. He gets cunningly held back by the force of his love for Ruth and he gets intent in his love for Ruth from which he vainly tries to remove himself. He finally finds himself completely getting degenerate and crumbled. For Robert there is no future, there is only past which keeps enervating and exhausting him all the time.

O'Neill seems to anticipate existential psychoanalysis in his plays, as he puts faith in man's future as against pressure of the past. The 'play' mentioned in the title of the thesis hints a 'play' between a determinate structure and a lack of it. In his plays, O'Neill would not wish a character to be unevenly corresponding to the inert and solidified world of objectified reality but a more fluid structure, generally corresponding to the human consciousness. This is a play between the complete and the incomplete, the fixed and the fluid consciousness, for Ruth tries to be both 'in-itself' and 'for-itself', as Sartre would say, and thus tends to become God. As is evident from the above analysis O'Neill would seem to take recourse not to empirical but to existential psychoanalysis in his plays. Jean-Paul Sartre is one of the most ardent advocates of the latter. In his magnum opus *Being and Nothingness* (1943), he gives a detailed and critical estimate of what a man actually is and how his personality is sought to be understood though inadequately through empirical psychology.

Sartre holds that empirical psychology speculates that man can be understood or defined by his fixed desires, complexes to be accurate. It seems to be an imperfect description because it is based on a false assumption that desire is there in man by virtue of being fixed in his unconsciousness. Empirical psychology also believes, though falsely, that the meaning of desire is intrinsic in desire itself. Sartre asks: "when I desire a house, a glass of water or the body of a woman .... beware then of considering these desires as little psychic entities dwelling in my consciousness". (712) Empirical psychology also makes a mistake when it

considers a person a concrete collective of some empirical desires. This psychology is reductive in the sense that man is regarded nothing but as a pack of desires or tendencies discernable in his obvious behaviour. This psychology reduces the complex personality of a different to merely an aggregate of a few basic and primal. I desire “ just as a chemist reduces the compound bodies to merely a combination of simple bodies”. (Satre 713). The person is not a mechanical cumulative of a few components as a machine is. This method is also based on a statement that a separable of act is produced by the connection of some abstract universal laws. According to this approach of empirical mindset, “ the abstract then is by hypothesis prior to the concrete, and the tangible is only an organization of abstract qualities (Satre 714). This means that an individual is only a connection of some universal categories.

Existentialists who regard ‘ man’ as a concrete person reject this kind of reductionism as untrue and outrageous. They search for something which is veritably intricate, i. e. which cannot be condensed to some component parts. Existential psychology is an attempt to search for an intricate, whose irreducibility will be self-evident. Man as such cannot be reduced to a conglomerate of some ‘ desires’. Empirical psychology also explains all human behaviour as a product of incentive response pattern. This would mean that the behaviour of man is reliant on the ‘ Other’ and that man does not exist for himself, but also exists for others. Man cannot be analyzed and compact to original givens, or to the strongminded desires like an object characterized by certain properties. In such a case ‘ man’ disappears. We

cannot view him as the one who is capable of undertaking certain skills which tend to augment his inner resources. The being in whose search we engage ourselves shall vanish in the dust of miracles bound together by external connection. In this way, the pure analytical description of man can be no bounce of imagination be construed adequate and satisfying.

If we contribute to the view point that man must be viewed in totality, we cannot hope to rebuild him by an adding or by an organization of the varied tendencies which we have empirically discovered in him. On the contrary, a person's each propensity and each feeling gives us an inkling of multi-layered structure of his personality. There are two types of being which Sartre, using Hegel's terminology, describes as the one 'for-itself' ('pour-soi') and the other 'in-itself' ('en-soi'). Sartre expounds 'in-itself' as prevailing in a fully determinate and non-relational way. This fully characterizes its transcendence of the conscious experience. In contrast with the 'in-itself', the 'for-itself' is mainly characterized by a lack of identity with itself. This is a consequence of the following Sartean view that consciousness is always 'of something', and is, therefore, well-defined in relation to something else. It has no nature beyond this, and is thus, completely translucent. Thus " being-in-itself is prior to being for-itself; the latter is dependent upon the former for its origin; being for-itself is derived from being-in-itself by an act of inhalation, for being in-itself inhabits emptiness in the heart of being. (Magill 1080).

In so far, as the 'for-itself' always exceeds the particular conscious experience, any attempt to clutch it within a conscious sphere is ruined to

failure. The man (for-itself) is such a being that in its being 'in-itself' is in question in the form of a choice. To such a man, 'being' means to make known to himself what he is by means of a prospect appearing as a value. Prospect and value belong to the being of the 'for-itself'. Thus, the 'for-itself' is defined, in reality, as an insufficient of a being and the 'possibility' is interpretable in terms of what he lacks. This lack can be spoken in terms of his freedom. It means that man chooses because of his being imperfect. Fundamentally, man is what he desires to be. Man never is but always wants 'to be' and the existence of this desire cannot be established through an experiential induction. It is rather the result of an 'a priori' description of the being of the man since desire is a lack. This means that the 'for-itself' is such a being whose very 'being' is submissive to externals. Man is what he is not and he is not what he is. This is simply manifest in Mayo brothers.

It may then be incidental that pure simple empirical description can only give us the lists and put us in the presence of pseudo constituents. To understand existence (totality of the for-itself), it is not enough to draw up a list of behaviour patterns, of drives and inclinations. It is necessary also to decrypt them. This can be done only according to the rules of a precise method. This method is called the existential psychoanalysis. The first principle of this method is that man is a totality and not a collection. This implies that he states himself as a whole even in his most insignificant and his most superficial behaviour. Accordingly, the goal of psychoanalysis is to decrypt the empirical behaviour patterns of man, that is, to bring out in the open the revelations which each one of them covers and then to fix them abstractly.



The first outline of psychoanalytical method was furnished by the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), and his followers.

The psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud inspired the method of existentialists. Both of these methods consider all objectively visible manifestations of psychic life as symbols which show their figurative relations to the fundamental or the total structure of the individual person. Both these methods of psychoanalysis consider that there are no primary such as genetic dispositions, character etc. Existential psychoanalysis at least recognizes nothing before the original expansion of human freedom and empirical psychoanalysis also holds that the original affectivity of the individual is a virgin before its history. Thus, both consider man in the world and do not imagine that one can question the being of man without taking into account his entire situation. Both types of psychoanalyses search within an existing situation for an important attitude which cannot be expressed by simple, logical definitions because it is prior to all logic.

However, empirical psychoanalysis differs from existential psychoanalysis in the way that empirical psychoanalysis is based on a hypothesis of the existence of an unconscious psyche, which always remain unseen from the institution of the subject. Existential psychoanalysis discards this hypothesis of unconscious and makes all psychic acts coextensive with consciousness. Bad faith is Sartre's replacement for the Freudian notion of the unconscious. Bad faith for Sartre is a false replication on men's own mental states; a systematic self-deception about the nature of the pre-reflective basis for reflection. Another fundamental difference between the two methods is that

empirical psychoanalysis refers to its own complex like 'libido' or 'will to power' and does not allow these fundamentals to make themselves known in a self-evident institution. On the other hand, existential psychoanalysis will lead us to suggest that the choice accounts for its original contingency. This is established on the basis of lack of being, which is considered as a fundamental character of being; it receives its lawfulness 'as a choice'. It is understood from this that existential psychoanalysis does not have to proceed from fundamental complexes to concept.